

BEYOND LECHMERE NORTHWEST CORRIDOR PLANNING PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

**State Transportation Building, Conference Room 1
Boston, MA**

June 3, 2004

Minutes

Introductions

Joe Cosgrove, MBTA Planning Department Project Manager, opened the meeting at 12:16 PM. He welcomed those present and invited attendees to introduce themselves (See Attendance). Mr. Cosgrove noted that the Advisory Committee for this project was large with nominations submitted by Cambridge, Boston, Medford and Somerville City Halls. Mr. Cosgrove added that the MBTA was looking for broad involvement by the public for this project.

Groundrules/ Role of Advisory Committee

Mr. Cosgrove said that it was important to lay out the groundrules for the public involvement for the project. A copy of proposed groundrules and procedures for the Advisory Committee was distributed (attached). Mr. Cosgrove reviewed the handout, which included group goals and guidelines for participation. He noted that the group would use a consensus approach and vote only on the groundrules. If the group does not reach consensus on an aspect of the project, the summary minutes will record the differences and the MBTA will consider all of the opinions.

Mr. Cosgrove noted that the Beyond Lechmere Northwest Corridor project was part of a 2000 Administrative Consent Order (ACO) related to Central Artery mitigation, but the project was described only generally as a Green Line extension at the time. The MBTA was not actually a party to the ACO, which was negotiated by the Commonwealth. The MBTA's funding structure has been changed since the negotiation of the agreement. The MBTA is proceeding with project planning, but at this time, there is no funding programmed for implementing the project with the MBTA's budget, nor in the state's.

An attendee asked what the Central Artery mitigation entailed. Mr. Cosgrove explained that a series of transit legal commitments were made by state policy makers in the early 1990's to improve the regional transit system as mitigation for the Central Artery/Tunnel highway capacity project. Most of these transit commitments, which were formalized in environmental regulation, the State Implementation Plan for U.S. Clean Air Act compliance and an updated 2000 Administrative Consent Order between Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) and Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA), have been completed over the past decade. Outstanding commitments are expansion projects with deadlines of December 2011; they are: restoration of the Arborway, a Red Line-Blue Line connector, and a Green Line

extension [this project]. No funding has been identified or programmed for construction of these projects and it is assumed in the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Regional Transportation Plan that state legislative action will be required given the fiscal realities of transit financing. Mr. Cosgrove gave brief overview of the MBTA financing system of Forward Funding. He also noted that state policy makers are working to address the gap between ACO commitments and available funding and will be laying out a process in which the commitments may be changed to reflect policy priorities for the region.

Mr. Cosgrove explained that for a Beyond Lechmere project to advance, it needs to be defined beyond an idea concept through a formal planning process that includes identifying transportation problems that need to be solved. Currently, the MBTA operates on a fixed-revenue stream. In order for this project to advance, a case for funding will need to be made to the Commonwealth and federal government.

Mr. Cosgrove said that within 8 months, the project team plans to screen all viable alternatives and advance 2 or 3 alternatives, which would -subject to funding-move into the environmental review process.

Mr. Cosgrove promised to have a formal list of members of the Advisory Committee by the next meeting. He also noted that all Advisory Committee meetings will be open to the public, and there will be a 10-15 minute period reserved for public comment at each meeting. Community meetings will also be scheduled at various stages in the process.

Ellin Reisner, Somerville representative, asked if background materials will be available in advance of each meeting. Mr. Cosgrove said that the team will do its best to send information out in advance. Ms. Reisner then asked if the details about the legal framework of this process could be made available. Mr. Cosgrove said that this process is a planning one, and another group is meeting on the funding issue. He added that he will see if he can get copies of the Administrative Consent Order and information on the State Implementation Plan (SIP) commitments to send to the Advisory Committee before the next meeting.

Another attendee asked for a list of members of the group dealing with the ACO issues. Jeff Levine, Somerville representative, said that the planning process will need to incorporate the issue of mitigation.

Joe Lynch, Somerville representative, confirmed that all Advisory Committee meetings will be open to the public.

Mr. Lynch asked if the location of the Advisory Committee meetings will rotate among the impacted communities. He added that it would be helpful to do so. Mr. Cosgrove noted that it may be less confusing to always meet at a central location. He suggested the possibility of meeting at Tufts University, but noted that this issue would be addressed later in the meeting.

Overview of Planning Process

Mike McArdle, Project Manager for the consultant, VHB, then gave an overview of the planning process. He noted that the process must follow the guidelines for alternative analysis provided by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in order to be eligible for federal funding. He said the key to this process was identifying a Purpose and Need framework. He added that the Purpose and Need will continue to be refined throughout the process. Mr. McArdle also reviewed the existing MBTA technology alternatives, noting that new technologies would not be part of the alternatives analysis since the MBTA does not want to add new systems at this point in time.

Project Background & History

Mr. McArdle reviewed the project history (attached) and said the alternatives from previous studies would be examined. He added that a base assumption for the analysis is the relocation of Lechmere Station to the east side of McGrath Highway, which is part of the North Point Development Project. Mr. Cosgrove said that the cost of the relocation will not be applied to this project.

Mr. McArdle also reviewed local roadways, arterials, interstates, existing transit services, and activity centers.

Mr. McArdle finally reviewed the project schedule. An attendee asked for a copy of the schedule. Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates, said it would be sent to the Advisory Committee.

Lee Auspitz, Somerville representative, asked why the MBTA was not considering innovative modes of transit like DMUs. Mr. Cosgrove said that incorporating innovative modes into MBTA operations was a systems issue, not a corridor-specific issue. He added that the scope of the analysis was to consider all viable alternatives and keep operational constraints in mind. Mr. Auspitz asked what modes are approved. Mr. McArdle said the modes are Light Rail, Bus Rapid Transit, Commuter Rail, and Local Bus. He added that the group is free to bring up other possible modes that the Project Team may be review without extensive analysis.

Scott Darling, Conservation Law Foundation, asked why Orange Line technology was not included in the list. Mr. McArdle said he will add Heavy Rail.

Jim Kostaras, Somerville representative, asked if the implications of issues like maintenance facilities will be included in the analysis. Mr. McArdle said the first step is to define the alternatives because each alternative has different issues associated with it. Mr. Kostaras asked if such facilities need to be at the terminus of the route. Mr. McArdle said not necessarily, although terminus facilities make the most economic sense. Mr. Cosgrove said the scope of this first phase study will include flagging issues like this, but not dealing with siting at this stage.

Vineet Gupta, Boston Transportation Department, said the maintenance needs should be emphasized because they could impact the mode chosen. He also noted that alternatives will have differing impacts on the existing system, and he asked if adjustments to the existing system will be examined. Mr. Cosgrove said the Transportation Systems Management (TSM) alternative, which is the baseline alternative, will examine how to beef up the existing service. He added that corridor issues and service impacts will be part of the discussion.

Jim McGinnis, Somerville representative, asked why the base assumption included the relocation of Lechmere station. He said that station provides a valuable service to East Cambridge and its movement would be prejudicial to a possible alignment. Mr. Cosgrove said the relocation of Lechmere is the prerequisite to an existing agreement with Guilford for planned development in North Point. Mr. McGinnis asked if the station could be moved to an alternative location. Mr. Cosgrove said this project will need to coordinate with the North Point project. He added that the contract with Guilford called for the relocation to be completed in November 2005, and the project is obviously behind schedule.

Ms. Reisner said she thought that Assembly Square should be included in the list of Activity Centers. Mr. McArdle said it was a good point and would include it.

Colin Durrant, Senator Barrios' Office, asked when in the process the larger community meetings will occur. Mr. Cosgrove said they will ideally happen over the summer and fall. One meeting should get community input on the draft Purpose and Need, while the other meeting should focus on the evaluation of alternatives. Lauren DiLorenzo, Medford representative, said that the MBTA should consider postponing the meetings until after Labor Day because turnout is generally much lower during the summer months. Mr. Cosgrove said he will consider this point.

Mr. Levine asked if the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) will be doing the modeling. He also asked if they will be including the Urban Ring project as part of their assumptions. Mr. Cosgrove said that CTPS will use Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) land-use assumptions as part of their methodology. He noted that currently CTPS has had a placeholder for this project in current modeling efforts, and he will work to ensure that efforts are not duplicated. He said that CTPS will be available at subsequent meetings to discuss methodology in greater detail.

Discussion of Corridor Issues/ Mobility Needs

Mr. Cosgrove noted that input from resident and users of the system is a critical element for this process. He invited members of the Advisory Committee to discuss problems and gaps in service they have observed.

Melissa Bennett, Medford representative, said she thought the study area was too limited. She suggested looking at an extension all the way to West Medford, which would be greatly served by better transit. She noted that parking facilities already exist in that area. Mr. Cosgrove said that this possibility can be examined because the

Administrative Consent Order is vague as to the route. Ms. Bennett asked if previous studies had looked at West Medford as a terminus. Mr. McArdle said they all stop earlier. Mr. Cosgrove asked where in West Medford she was suggesting a station. Ms. Bennett suggested looking at the current Commuter Rail station.

Ms. DiLorenzo said a project goal should be increased access to public transit. She noted that for mixed-use development to be part of the effort, some siting issues need to be addressed. Transit should be directed to these areas and not residential areas, to lessen impacts to neighborhoods. She added that the study needs to examine issues like parking, traffic signalization and zoning.

Mr. Kostaras said he agreed with Ms. DiLorenzo. He added that Somerville is not a well-served area with the exception of the Red Line and Davis Square. He said increased transit is critical to a larger economic development strategy.

Mr. Auspitz concurred. He said that he had been part of the planning efforts during the Red Line extension to Davis Square and pointed out that a flexibility of approach could help a project. For example, the Davis Square station was built without a parking garage unlike what was initially suggested. He also said increased transit can help a community by increasing the residential tax.

Bill White, Somerville representative, agreed that flexibility is important to the process. He suggested taking the Fitchburg Line into account as part of a solution. Mr. Cosgrove said it will be examined. Currently shared-use policies within the corridor are being investigated. Mr. White then asked that the MBTA consider all alternatives, noting that the communities will not find increasing bus service as a meaningful solution. Mr. Cosgrove said that all alternatives need to be examined, including bus service improvements as a baseline alternative.

Mr. McGinnis said he was concerned about the environmental justice issue. He said that the area in question is a low-income, minority area that is poorly served by public transit. He said that community has high transit use and high traffic congestion. He noted that Somerville residents have elevated lung cancer and asthma rates because of the transportation burden that residents bear, largely from highways and use of local streets by commuters. He said there should be an attempt to remedy this long-time imbalance.

Jason Schrieber, Cambridge representative, said that air quality issues that have resulted in legal justifications for commitments need to be included in the Purpose and Need. Mr. Cosgrove that the Advisory Committee needs to be careful about relying primarily on legal commitments to make the argument for the project. Mr. Schrieber said that air quality is a central issue. Mr. Cosgrove said that documented air quality issues will definitely be considered as a secondary impact. He said that mobility issues are the primary criteria, though.

Catherine Preston, Cambridge representative, said that air quality is a real-world problem regardless of the legal commitments. She said that development at North Point and East Cambridge should reduce BMTs in the area to increase trips made without cars.

Larry Parnell, Cambridge representative, said that pedestrian access to the new Lechmere station is critical. He said that connectivity between modes (such as between a West Medford stop and the Commuter Rail) is important.

Mr. Levine said that travel time to downtown Boston is a real issue for the area. He said that the new Sullivan Square exit has also aggravated mobility issues, and the traffic problem on Washington St. needs addressing. He said that he also agreed with Mr. Schrieber about the air quality issue.

Todd Blake, Somerville representative, said the new ramp from Route 93 and the closure of the ramps to City Square has increased traffic monumentally. He added that air quality is a major component for evaluation.

Mr. Lynch asked how the MBTA will finance the project. He asked if the federal transportation funding was on a 6-year cycle and if the Green Line extension is not included in the current cycle, how long it might take to get funding. Mr. Cosgrove said the first step is to define a project and added we are at the beginning of the early planning process. He said it was not unusual for the process to plan, design, permit and secure funding for a project to take about ten years. Mr. Lynch noted that many of the alternatives include proposed land-use. He said the public entities need to make decisions about this land, and it will be helpful for the Group to understand that this project is not happening for 6-10 years. Mr. Cosgrove said that it was all subject to funding, and the project needs to become eligible first.

Mr. Darling suggested that the project team walk through the process for a project to become eligible for New Starts funding. A chart (attached) describing this process was distributed. Mr. Cosgrove said that New Starts was the main source of funding for transit expansion. He said that the funding issue will be discussed in greater detail at the next meeting, noting that financial feasibility is one criterion. Mr. Darling added that he thought air quality was an important issue as well.

Ms. Reiser asked for details about the New Starts timeframe. Mr. Cosgrove said that other projects were in the New Starts queue before this one. He added that a Congressional earmark helps, but currently there is a backlog of highly competitive projects. For example, the Silver Line project has been in the queue for about 10 years.

Ken Krause, Medford representative, said that connectivity is an important consideration. He said that the maps provided to the Group should also include the Minuteman Bike Trail. He said that the Green Line expansion is just one spoke in the hub and will affect other connections. Interaction of the modes should be examined.

Mr. Lynch said that all three communities have heard about this project for years and are getting impatient with the lack of progress. Mr. Cosgrove said that he understands the level of frustration, but currently the project is not part of the MBTA's financing plan. He said that there is some thought that the MBTA's capital budget should be spent to maintaining the existing system. He pointed out that operating cost impacts will be part of the evaluation criteria. Mr. Cosgrove said that legislators can champion the project and help make the case for the project. He added that one purpose of the Advisory Committee is to enhance communication between the MBTA and the communities. Advisory Committee members can help educate their communities about the project status.

Ms. DiLorenzo said that for citizen participation to be effective, several issues need to be addressed. The Advisory Committee should try not to use too many acronyms and technical terms so individuals do not become confused. She also said that she hoped the process can involve a more diverse population, broader than the Advisory Committee represented. She also noted that it was possible to lose participation by bringing people in too early during the process.

Next Meeting

After some discussion, the Group agreed that the next meeting will be scheduled for **June 24, 2004 from noon to 2 PM**. Mr. Cosgrove said that for the time being, the meeting will be scheduled for the State Transportation Building to eliminate confusion.

Open Forum

Mr. Cosgrove then opened the meeting for questions from the general public. Wig Zamore, Somerville resident, said he had a list of issues and comments. First, he suggested that using existing Commuter Rail alignments as a route starts the project with poor land-use. He said that this approach would not serve the East Cambridge and Lechmere commercial districts, and the North Point area was an extremely small area.

Mr. Zamore's second concern regarded air quality in the area. He cited the importance of the Administrative Consent Order and the Ozone SIP and noted the health burdens placed on the corridor.

Mr. Zamore then requested an anticipated schedule for the project phases and how they impact with other processes. Mr. Cosgrove said that the project was currently in Phase One, the Alternatives Analysis Phase. This phase was anticipated to last 8 months. He noted that for subsequent phases (Phase 2-Preliminary Engineering; Phase 3-Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)), funding is not yet available.

Mr. Zamore said he was concerned that a major transit project was not going to result from this process. He said in the Phase 3 of the project Scope, this is stated in italics. **[The project team was not able to find this reference after the meeting.]**

Mr. Zamore said that ridership estimates need to address the land-use connection. He said that the 1984 study underestimated Davis Square ridership. He said that current

ridership numbers suggest that 0% of riders travel from Boston to Lechmere, which he thinks is inaccurate.

Mr. Zamore also expressed concern at the lack of public and environmental justice involvement in the decision to move Lechmere station. Mr. Cosgrove said there would be coordination between this project and the North Point one. He said his understanding is that design work will soon be getting underway for the new station, and under agreement the North Point developer is responsible for station design and construction with review and coordination through the MBTA.

Mr. Zamore suggested adding Magoon Square, Wellington, and Community College to the provided maps. He also suggested that maintenance facilities for vehicles could be located in other areas. Mr. Cosgrove said that would be an issue for MBTA Operations to address.

Mr. Zamore suggested that the MBTA keep an open mind about alternative technologies.

Mr. Zamore said that Cambridge and Boston needed to meet the guidelines of the Clean Air Act. He said that fewer than 10% of the cars in East Cambridge are Cambridge in origin, and less than 10% of the cars in the corridor are from Somerville. He said the Commonwealth needs to provide money to meet the Ozone SIP, adding that the Transportation Bond Bill proposes \$259 million in matching funds.

Mr. Lynch asked that Mr. Zamore provide background about the sources of his comments to Advisory Committee members. Mr. Zamore agreed to do so.

Mr. Lynch asked if the Green Line extension would be de-railed if Lechmere station were not relocated. Mr. Cosgrove said station relocation is a prerequisite to Green Line Extension alternatives and that North Point represents an opportunity, as without that development, the cost of relocation would have to be absorbed by this public infrastructure project.

Mr. Cosgrove adjourned the meeting at 2:07 PM.

Action Items:

- **Provide a formal list of Advisory Committee members (MBTA)**
- **Provide copies of the Administrative Consent Order (MBTA), if possible**
- **Provide copies of SIP agreement (MBTA)**
- **Provide copies of the schedule**
- **Provide a copy of the Powerpoint presentation to the Committee members**

**BEYOND LECHEMERE NORTHWEST CORRIDOR PLANNING PROJECT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**State Transportation Building, Conference Room 1
Boston, MA**

June 3, 2004

Attendance

Lee Auspitz*	Davis Square Task Force
Anna M. Barry	MBTA
Jeff Bennett*	Charles River TMA
Melissa B. Bennett*	Medford
Todd Blake*	City of Somerville Traffic Dept.
Dan Breen	MBTA
Brendan Chisholm	Office of Rep. Ciampa
Scott Darling*	Conservation Law Foundation
Lauren DiLorenzo*	City of Medford
Colin Durrant	Office of Senator Barrios
Robert Feigin*	Medford
Todd Fontanella	EOTC
Geraldine Freda*	City of Medford
Vineet Gupta*	Boston Transportation Dept.
Jim Kostaras*	OHCD Somerville
Ken Krause*	City of Medford
Adam Knight	Office of Sen. Shannon
Jon Lenichek	Office of Congressman Capuano
Jeff Levine*	Somerville
Joseph P. Lynch Jr.*	Somerville
James McGinnis*	STEP
Michaela Morzuch	Office of Rep. Marzilli
Charles E. O'Brien	City of Somerville DPW
Tuck O'Brien	City of Somerville
Larry Parnell*	Cambridge
Catherine Preston*	City of Cambridge
Ellin Reisner*	STEP
Dan Ryan	Office of Congressman Capuano
Nelson Salazar*	The Welcome Project (Somerville)
Erik Scheier	MBTA
Jason Schrieber*	City of Cambridge Traffic Dept.
Rae Stiening	ECPT
Lucy Warsh*	Office of Mayor Curtatone
Karen Wepsic	MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee
Bill White*	Somerville Board of Alderman
Rick Willette*	City of Somerville DPW

Wig Zamore

Somerville resident

Joe Cosgrove

MBTA Planning Dept.

Regan Checchio

Regina Villa Associates

Nancy Farrell

Regina Villa Associates

Mike McArdle

VHB

Jan Okolowicz

PB

Kristine Wickham

VHB

*** denotes Advisory Committee Member**